

Coins

Caution: Con men at work, as coin forgeries surface

By Roger Boye

WHEN HELEN LONG of Chicago bought a 1916-D dime from a mail-order dealer in 1976, she knew little about detecting fake or altered coins.

"I assumed that any dealer advertising in a national publication wouldn't sell phony merchandise," said Long, who had shelled out \$165 for the coin, the kinkin of the Mercury dime series.

Three months ago, Long (not her real name) acquired a powerful magnifying glass and began examining the details on her favorite coins. She quickly discovered that the "D" mint mark on her supposedly rare dime had been soldered to the coin by a con man.

"I wrote the dealer to try to get my money back, but the letter was returned with 'addressee unknown' on it. At least this won't happen again; I've become an overnight expert on fake coins," she added.

Long's woeful story could be repeated by hundreds of other collectors. Although most dealers are honest, the "bad apples" know that many hobbyists cannot detect a soldered mint mark or other alteration.

Coin forgery is illegal, of course, but that doesn't stop the swindlers. In fact, they have been producing even better-looking, more deceptive fakes in recent months, said Ed Fleischmann, one of two coin authenticators who work for the American Numismatic Association's Certification Service (ANACS).

From 30 to 40 per cent of the approximately 800 coins examined by ANACS each month are fakes,

Fleischmann said. The 1916-D dime, 1932-D and 1932-S quarters, 1922 no mint mark cent, and 1893-S dollar are the coins most often found to be altered, he added.

Soldering mint marks to coins is such a common method of forgery that some con artists have the process down to a science. For example, two forgers had operated a "mint mark factory" for nearly five years in Scranton, Pa., before the law caught up with them.

The men specialized in producing fake 1916-D dimes, and in one year could have made as many as 128,000 of them, said an article in *The Numismatist*.

In addition to soldering (or gluing) mint marks to coins, forgers use many other techniques to produce fakes, including:

- Altering the date of a coin. For example, by grinding down the digit "6" on a relatively common 1936-S cent, and then using solder, forgers make the coin appear to be a rare 1931-S cent, Fleischmann said.

- Casting counterfeit coins. Some forgers make a mold from a genuine rare coin and "mint" their own copy. Many fake gold coins are produced this way.

- Splitting coins, a method used to forge 1950-D nickels and other coins. For example, the forger grinds off the tails side of a relatively common 1950 Philadelphia Mint nickel, and also grinds off the heads side of a common-date 1964-D nickel. He then solders or glues together the two "good" halves.